

- ***Read Luke 9:23-26/Prayer*** Our text here in **Luke 9** and its sister text in **Matthew 16** are both preceded by the well known account of Jesus asking His disciples an all important question....“Who do men say that I am?” They give various answers, but then the ever spoken Peter proclaims that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. Matthew’s account gives a bit more detail that Luke does. We then see Jesus proclaiming His coming Kingdom and church. He also details how He would have to suffer at the hands of godless men in order for His objective to be accomplished on earth.
- However, Peter is none too pleased with what Jesus has to say, and calls Him down from his words concerning His impending death. Jesus responds strongly by telling Peter that his thoughts are not in line with the plans of God and that he and Satan needed to move on out of the way from Jesus and His plans for mankind. Jesus then transitions into what is said in **Matthew 16:24-27** and **Luke 9:23-26**. We are going to focus specifically on Luke’s account and consider the difficult teaching of Jesus that declares concerning those who might follow Him. If we want to follow Jesus then we must deny ourselves and take up our cross.

I. DIFFICULTY OF THIS TEACHING: We often want to “follow” Jesus on our own terms.

- A. As humans, we want to do what we want to do, and we will often try to do whatever it is that we want to do unless someone either stops us or demands otherwise. Remember from this morning in **Isaiah 53:6**, that we are like sheep that have gone astray. And it isn't that we're not just good at directions, but it is that we have chosen to go our own way and to go where we like. This type of “I’ll do what I want” mentality has been true about man from nearly the beginning.
- B. Eve wanted to eat of the forbidden fruit and why? Because she wanted to be made wise. Men created idols that represented their god and why? Because they wanted God to look like they wanted him to. We have so many different churches today and why? Because man wants to “follow” Jesus, but they want to follow Him in the way that they enjoy the best.
- C. It isn't that God’s Word is truly that hard to understand, interpret, or comprehend, but instead the issue is that men read what they want to into and out of the Text. They want to follow Jesus in the way they want, but this difficult teaching of Jesus demands that we follow Him on His terms.

II. We must make the decision to follow Jesus.

- A. A significant portion of the Christian community would ignore this small yet extremely important portion of this text. Jesus says, “If anyone wishes to come after me..” (NASB) “If anyone wants to be come my follower..” (NET) “he must deny himself.” Jesus puts the responsibility on the individual whether or not he will follow Jesus. He does not say, “then I will open his heart to be able to accept me.”
- B. The truth is that the decision to follow Jesus is a decision that every single person is allowed to make on their own. The Calvinist would like to say that a person does not have the ability to make the decision to follow Jesus, but Jesus Himself says that the decision to follow Jesus must begin with the decision for the person to first deny himself.
- C. Why does this matter? Why is it necessary for this point to me made? It matters and is necessary because men are notorious for making excuses and put the responsibility on someone else for anything and everything...including their decision to follow or not follow Jesus.
- D. There will be no room for anyone knowing of Jesus and His Lordship to claim that he never followed Jesus because “He never acted upon my heart.” or “He never spoke and called me to Himself.” No, Jesus most certainly did act upon the heart of every man and woman and He called every single man and woman to Himself when He was hung naked from a tree. He made known to each and every one of us our need for grace when He offered His perfect self for a people who are anything but worthy. We have zero excuse to say that Jesus or God has done enough to persuade us to follow Jesus. They did it all, and it is up to us whether or not we will get over ourselves and make the decision to follow Him.

III. Following Jesus means dying to self.

- A. But this decision to follow Jesus certainly isn't an easy one. In fact, Jesus pulls no punches when He declares that the person who desires to follow Him must first deny himself and then really drives the point home by saying that he must take up his cross. Sadly, a lot of the significance of Jesus’s words are lost on us in the 21st century because the true nature of the cross isn't familiar to us.

- B. For us, the cross is often depicted as a symbol of hope because of the actions of Jesus in allowing Himself to be put to death on the cross. Often crosses are used as symbolic decoration in homes, on people, in church houses, on Bibles, and other places. These crosses are often beautiful to the eyes and, again, bring forth positive emotions of hope. However, you would never find the cross depicted in such a way before recent times. We sometimes miss the true meanings of what is written in Scripture because we aren't the original recipients who would understand the meaning of some of the 1st century phrases, and this is certainly one of those times.
- C. The cross, to the 1st century person, was not a symbol of hope...but it was instead the symbol of pain, agony, and death. It is our equivalent to the electric chair or the lethal needle. Except for the fact that death on the cross was a public spectacle that was meant to deter others from breaking Roman law. The Romans were not shy about doing something this cruel in order to keep the populous inline.
- D. This truly is one of the greatest paradoxes in scripture. Sure the cross was the means by which the perfect blood of Jesus was shed and it stood for death in the days of Jesus, but it does result in hope for us today. However, just because we hope in the cross where Jesus died doesn't mean that we should let the significance of Jesus's words be lost on us. So what does Jesus mean when we must deny ourselves and take up our cross?
- E. I am convinced that the 1st century Christian would have taken this teaching of Jesus extremely seriously. To them and to us, we ought to read Jesus's words in this text and understand that Jesus is expecting for the follower of His to die. Not to literally die by killing the body, but to die to their own desire and will in order to live in Jesus. No where else is this type of mindset which leads to action more evident than in **Romans 6 and Galatians 2:20. Romans 6** speaks about the the death of the sinner so that he might live to Christ. His old way of life is over and he now lives according to Christ. In **Galatians 2:20**, Paul speaks personally about the fact that he was crucified with Christ. We see the connection here with the cross, and to him it was as if he had died and Jesus was living through him in his body and life. Every decision he made was decided by Christ and not himself. It was not about Paul anymore, but it was about Jesus. It wasn't about Paul saving his life. It wasn't about Paul gaining physical things in this life. It was about Paul always advancing Jesus and His will for man.

IV. Following Jesus is an everyday decision and commitment.

- A. The decision to follow Jesus is not one that should be taken lightly. There is no decision that an individual makes that is of more importance. Even important decisions such as what we will do for a living, where we will, or who we will marry do not compare to the decision about whether or not we will follow Jesus.
- B. Jesus was very up front with people about their desire to follow Him. Here in Luke, as opposed to Matthew, we find Jesus throwing in the all important word of "daily." A commitment to Jesus is not something that includes a trial period. It is something that one must fully buy into from the beginning because pseudo commitments are worthless to Jesus. He must be the full desire of the person who wants to follow Him. **(Luke 9:57-62)**
- C. In another text where Jesus reiterates basically the exact same thing as here in **Luke 9**, he there adds a portion concerning the necessity to count the cost of discipleship. **(Luke 14:25-33)** Are we considering what will have to change in our lives to follow Jesus. As disciples do we continue to remember that following Jesus means we must die to self and live to Christ. Do we each and every day wake up resolved to follow Him all throughout that day? This ought to be our mindset. When we make the decision to follow Jesus, He expects for this commitment to be just like our marriages, "till death do us part." Except that we will not part from Jesus, but we will instead being moving on to be closer to Him than we were in this life.

While some things that Biblical writers wrote might not resonate with us as they did to the original readers, it is important for us to take the time to consider the significance of what is written in God's Word. Taking ourself back to thinking like the first century person or Old Testament Jew can go along way in helping us to be impacted by those things that we have today that build and sustain our faiths. May we truly understand the significance of denying ourselves and taking up our cross. May we daily be strong enough in our faith to take up our cross, to die to self, and to allow Christ to live through us through us. May our following of Jesus please our Lord and may we encourage others to live in the same way so that we will inherit the great reward of heaven when this life is over.